

# FORUM

Internal Party Journal of the S.P.G.B.

No. 1

OCTOBER 1952

SIXPENCE

## THE NATURE OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Party is discussing questions which bear closely on its object and principles, questions it has not always deemed it necessary to discuss. We are busy criticising our own position. This healthy situation has developed, not, I think, as a perversion resulting from the world's indifference, nor as a mere clerkly desire for a half-century stock-taking; it registers, rather, the impact of actual history. It reflects (as does the whole field of science) the uncertainties of a revolution in process—from liberalism to communism—in contrast with the certainties of the nineteenth-century consolidation of revolution achieved (from Mercantilism to Industrialism).

We used to say that conditions were ripe for Socialism. We still take this view, with a pinch of salt. From this questioning of ripeness stems our controversies: why aren't the workers socialist; is there a transition stage; do men make history; can we hasten the ripening with mirrors to reflect light from the sun of Socialist society? In other words, ripe? how ripe? how to ripen? And this questioning is a social product. It is perhaps our acknowledgment (as yet unconscious, as always in the first place) that the Industrial Revolution which established "social production" is not immediately followed by the revolution for social ownership, but by the State Capitalist revolution which establishes the institutional technique (and thereby the ideological demand) for the classless administration of the common weal.

The propositions here put forward have to be compressed within a page so that much more than is said must be left unsaid, and most of what is said must be left unexplained.

### PHASES OF A SINGLE REVOLUTION

The Socialist Revolution, which is the aim of our movement, is the final phase of a single revolution from production for use at one level to production for use at another, in which the succession of intermediate revolutions and social systems (Patriarchal Communism, Chattel Slavery, Feudalism, Mercantilism, Capitalism 1, 2, 3) are pre-requisite phases. Whatever the political incidents in which the Socialist Revolution culminates (what we call the "political act"), it is an historical and social process going on now and daily, and in which the dynamic element is capital. Whatever the form which the "political act" takes in the event (on which the Party wisely does not offer the precise prescription, which would be prophesy), it remains that it is the discussion of Socialism by Socialists which is the immediate Socialism-precipitating process. ("What Socialism will be like" has its relevance here.) It remains also that this discussion of Socialism is conditioned, determined, by the social effects of the accumulation of capital. What, therefore, has just been called the "immediate precipitant" is still itself the end result of its social, capital-determined, antecedents. It registers the accumulation of event which is history, it records the noisy breath of capital like everything else which (under Capitalism) is capital breathing. To insist on the history-creating character of ideological elements which are themselves social end-results has no point unless it is to urge creation out of nothing, and all the "Ah, buts" to this are only the pull of the animistic conception of history which the world (including the Party) has not yet outgrown. To insist that men make history is only to insist afresh, as of old, that man is God—an intractable habit not easily thought out of because it springs from the fact of thinking (the Word). To say that men's activities are always purposive, pre-conceived, makes sense; to say that man's being precedes his consciousness makes sense. Tell me that a necklace of alternate black and white beads begins with a black, or a white, and I'll accept it without hesitation as the starting point of your point. Insist, as a principle, on the precedence or subsequence of either thought or action, and I can only await the further development of history which will compel you to conceive of their concurrence.

### UNITY OF SOCIETY AND THOUGHT

History, which had hitherto been regarded as episodic, is accepted after Hegel as continuous. History, which had been regarded as created by the ideas of great men, is accepted after Marx as the product of human production. The current insistence that it is created by the ideas, not of a few great men, but of a lot of little ones, is only a bourgeois vulgarisation of the Feudal error. It is the proletarian revolutionary's version of God. History, which appears as a succession of revolutions (because the human senses cannot perceive the daily accumulation of event until the bell rings up each hundred) is a continuing series of social integrations in which the new includes the old, not by arithmetic but by digestion—social integrations which compel (with which *concur*) new conceptual integrations. The Newtonian physics, which wrote the laws of the universe on a postcard, accompanied the integration of the Nation State out of the separate Feudal baronies and dukedoms. Linnaeus and Darwin integrated living species, and Marx integrated social phenomena, in the Industrial Capitalism which integrated the former separate capitalist classes and working classes. To-day, in the integrative Total State, with its concept of one world, Einstein integrates space with time, energy with matter, electro-magnetic waves with light, etc.

### BEGINNINGS OF SOCIALIST EXPROPRIATION

The present revolution is dissolving industrial capitalist liberalism and digesting it into the new muscle and blood and thinking of Communism (Bad Thing). What is called the Welfare State is the combined effect of two revolutions which followed the Industrial Revolution: the revolution from the technique of absolute surplus value to the technique of relative S.V. (of which the nineteenth century legislation and social movements were the administrative apparatus), and the present State Capitalist revolution which is the permanent war economy. The State has become Welfare because it is a Warfare State. Whereas the nineteenth century abolished destitution poverty as a necessity of relative S.V., the twentieth century organises and equalises poverty as a necessity of war. Behind both is the accumulation of capital: because it both raises the "organic composition" of the worker, and intensifies international competition. Fiercer competition urges on the concentration

of capital in the State; State control furthers the depersonalising of property: this depersonalisation begins the expropriation which is the Socialist aim. It begins to change power based on naked ownership to power based on function; it begins to change domination of class by class into anonymous administration of things. It nobbles the captains of industry and moguls of commerce, as Mercantilism nobbled the pirate Drakes and Raleighs who opened up the world market. In the industrially developed west, the new bosses are at first the old bosses: in the east, the industrial revolution starts already at the political boss stage. But in the west, too, the Commissioners hold power by appointment, not by inheritance, a revolution the reverse of that by which elective tribal leaders became hereditary lords. The Commissions are integrated and subordinated at Cabinet level, and the Commissioners do not themselves receive or determine the amount of disposal of the surplus value produced by the workers. Within an industry, profit begins to become less the aim and more a condition. The aim is to provide the service required by State policy, while to cover costs, replacements and extensions, remains the condition which limits the service. Within the State there begins the form of production for use, while between States there remain the classical commodity relationships, the hungry search for markets and the Bomb.

### WARFARE-WELFARE STATE AND THE SOCIALIST ETHIC

"Welfare" is the counterpart, in the fields of distribution and administration, of what takes place in the field of production. Rationing, national health service, and direction of labour, are the hall marks of military capitalism (Communism): it is the common issue of rum and medicine and duty. It is not fantastic to conceive the extension of State control to all insurance; nor of the addition of transport to the "free" services by compulsory weekly stamp; nor of the unification of weekly stamp, quarterly rates and annual assessment into one PAYE, with Family Allowances, Pensions, Licences; nor of the increase in the centralised taxation to cover gas, electricity, refrigeration, laundry; nor of its extension to basic foods up to the standard ration fixed by the War Office—and the deduction at source of 90% of incomes instead of the 40% at present taken by the State. Is this more fantastic than a Socialist Revolution by workers conditioned to classical capitalism? Does the removal of the stigma of public assistance by its universalisation, or the replacement of furtive out-relief by respectable ration book, or the equalisation of speech and dress and education and military service, play no part in fostering the feelings favourable to "distribution according to needs"? Do Legitimacy Acts, equal pay, psychiatry instead of flogging, make no contribution towards the Socialist ethic of "equality of consideration"? Do we accept the materialist determination of "ideologies"—or are we idealists converting by logic independent of history? Do we proclaim that money must go, and raise our hands in revolutionary horror at the suggestion that we are already seeing it off? Do we accept the "transformation of quantity into quality" and the "historical necessity for Socialism" as empty articles of religious faith? Do we hold that each society carries the next in its womb, and prudishly disown the misshapen foetus?

### DO MEN MAKE HISTORY?

Whatever we wish, we cannot escape the influence of the Warfare-Welfare revolution whose vast social integrative processes are reflected in every field of thought—we least of all whose aim is to restore the integrity of men (split by the short historical explosion which divided use from value) in an integrated society based on use. We may well, within this journal, reconcile the pro- and anti-election schools by recognising our function neither as education nor as politics but as politico-criticism. We may even resolve the dilemma of Marx, which Engels fumbled, and from which the Party still suffers, of historical determinism and political free will. "All too long have the philosophers been content to interpret history, the time has come to change it." Here is an insoluble problem, because it is a problem wrongly stated. The only way to make history is to interpret it. Marx made history because he interpreted it, in the most brilliant historical document ever written. The only sense in which men consciously make history is in becoming conscious of what is happening, which is (in our time) to make State Capitalist society conscious of its preparatory function. The genius of Marx lay in his talent for seeing so clearly what was going on under his nose. And it still remains to some extent our evil genius that we see so clearly what went on under Marx's nose.

### THE POSITIVE CASE

That time is done. We in turn are shaken into thought by revolution. Willy nilly we are all both mother and midwife of the more positive case which will replace the propagandist's impossible task of telling people what they don't know by the historically creative one of the articulating for them what they do. We move from the negative attack on capitalist reform to the positive presentation of Socialism, in proportion as our propaganda stems from an integrated concept of history, which sees the succession of class societies as phases of a revolution from production for use at one level to production for use at another; in proportion as it is informed by a social philosophy which is shrewd enough to integrate the closing stages of one society with the emergent stages of the next, and by a political philosophy which is not afraid to proclaim the permanent needs of human nature instead of the historical relativity of human conduct.

This is the core of the positive case for Socialism, which emphasises less the poverty of the means of life (which Welfare makes more meaningless) and more the poverty of the mode of living (which Warfare makes more meaningful). It is the core of the positive Socialist case which integrates the need for good material things to enjoy with the equally paramount need for self-respect; the need, therefore, to integrate work with art, art with craft, craft with play, play with education, education with living. It is a positive case, not dragged out of the Utopian blue, but construed sensibly from the sum of human need—the need by upright, thinking, social man for work, for creative work, and for the enjoyment of other people's enjoyment of his work—and the sum of human history, which in creating the apparatus and attitudes for organising common poverty prepares for its transmutation into the organisation of common weal.

F. EVANS.



# THE BALLOT AND SOCIALISM

(We print below the substance of a dispute in which the W.S.P. has been engaged for some time on the question of the ballot. Some aspects of the issues involved are, we believe, the subject of a referendum, and any decisions arrived at are of course the domestic concern of the W.S.P. Nevertheless, there are matters and opinions involved in this controversy which go beyond the W.S.P. controversy and members of the S.P.G.B. as well as members of the W.S.P. and the companion parties are unlikely to resist the stimulus of argument. It can be taken for granted, however, that where principles or general propositions are questioned, they will be argued on their merits, and not in relation to the dispute in the W.S.P. Incidentally, though it may come as a surprise to some who regard the S.P.G.B. as "formalised" and "rigid", "FORUM" has been started on the assumption that no proposition is sacred and may be challenged.)

Here follows an open letter from a group of members of the W.S.P. and a reply by Comrade Cantor of the W.S.P.—Editors.)

## An open letter to all Members of the World Socialist Party

Dear Comrades,

At the 1951 Conference of our party, held in Detroit, the question of the party's stand on the ballot was discussed at some lengths and the following "compromise" statement was drawn up for presentation to the membership in the coming referendum:

*Under capitalism where the State machinery is in the hands of the capitalist class, the ballot can be used for the purpose of measuring the developing socialist consciousness of the working class. When this consciousness reaches a majority stage, the ballot can become the revolutionary weapon for the introduction of socialism.*

*If at the time the socialist majority is obtained, material conditions preclude the use of the ballot, then the majority will use whatever other means are at hand to introduce socialism.*

If this statement is voted in as the party position on the ballot, the W.S.P. will be adopting a stand contrary to the one which it and its companion parties have had since the S.P.G.B. was first organized. Those members who refuse to accept the party position that the ballot will be, not that it can (possibly) be the weapon of emancipation must answer the following question:

What other method than the ballot can a socialist majority use to show itself and the population as a whole that it is a majority to begin with? And how, other than by means of the ballot can it make its demands and wishes known?—unless these members actually reject the thesis that socialism must be brought about by a class-conscious majority.

The position of the companion parties on the question of the ballot has been set forth on numerous occasions in the S.P.G.B. pamphlets and in articles in the S.S. and W.S. over the years. To quote a few references:

*This political machinery must be captured by the workers organizing themselves into a political party, having for its object the overthrow of the present social system and the establishment of a system of society based upon common ownership of the means of living. Thus organized they must wrest control of the political machinery from the ruling class by means of the ballot, and having achieved this control, must use it to strip the capitalist class of their possessions, and consequently of their privileges.*

*The vote is to be the weapon. Let us inquire, therefore, what is the real nature of the vote. (pp. 41 and 42 Socialism—Library No. 9.)*

In a leaflet issued by the S.P. of C. entitled *THE VALUE OF THE VOTE*, reprinted from *The Western Socialist* for Feb., 1937, the following statements are made:

*We contend that class society can be eliminated and Socialism introduced, when a majority of the workers, making use of the modern weapon placed in their hands in all bourgeois democracies—The Franchise—take political power away from the capitalist class for the purpose of so doing.*

*and again:*  
*We accept the use of the franchise as the proper method because, in the ultimate analysis, it appears to be the only sane, feasible road to working class emancipation. We realize with sorrow the slowness of the pace, and would gladly discard our weapon in favour of anything that would get us to our goal sooner. But, alas, these better ways are not in evidence. We must therefore continue to educate and organize as before, understanding that when the expression at the polls attains a satisfactory status both the workers and capitalists "will know what to do". Their collective reactions to this social stimulus will mark the end of the old order, and the beginning of the new.*

*The workers will take possession of political power, and their opponents will either concede the victory or take the consequences.*

In *The Western Socialist* for December, 1947, an article by J. A. McDonald entitled *WORKERS AND THE VOTE* sums up as follows:

"Given a working class that understands the nature of Capitalism and Socialism, and the revolutionary action that is essential to change one into the other, we need have no fear concerning the weapon of emancipation—the vote."

In all our literature there is but one instance where there is any equivocation on our position on the ballot. This is in a leaflet entitled: "Introducing the W.S.P.", which is being distributed. This article, written by comrade Cantor, appeared originally in the W.S. for Nov.-Dec., 1949, minus the equivocating statement. "However, as a minority party, the World Socialist Party does not, nor should not, lay down the exact steps by which the majority, once it becomes socialist, will introduce socialism," which was ruled out by the unanimous decision of the editorial committee when the article first came up for review. At a subsequent meeting of the NAC in Detroit, the statement was reinserted by that body without appeal to the membership and the article was ordered drawn up in leaflet form.

There will be a referendum on this item also. We urge the membership to vote against the distribution of a leaflet which contains a statement that implies a luke warm position on the efficacy of the ballot as the revolutionary weapon.

We can sum up our stand on the question of the ballot as follows:

We advocate the use of the ballot as the means by which the working class will emancipate itself and the rest of mankind from class society. We have examined and found unacceptable such means as armed insurrection, general strike, workers' councils and spontaneous, un-organized mass action.

Until such time as we are shown how a conscious majority of socialists can make itself known and wrest control of the state from the capitalist class in any other way than through the ballot, we refuse to waste our energies upon idle conjecture.

We, therefore, urge our fellow-workers to join with us in a political party that is organized for the sole purpose of abolishing the wages system by means of the only weapon that is at our disposal—the franchise.

Group of Boston Comrades W.S.P.

## — COMRADE CANTOR'S REPLY —

I.  
The Open Letter issued by a group of Boston comrades has succeeded in doing one thing: it has elevated to a principle question whether or not socialism will come about through the ballot. The Open Letter categorically states that socialism will come about in one way only, through the ballot. If this position is adopted, then the line of demarcation between socialists and non-socialists will be the belief or non-belief in the ultimate efficacy of the ballot, and those who believe it may result from some other action by the conscious majority are repudiators of majority action, advocates of violence—in short, hold principles a socialist should not hold. Another reason for the untenability of the Open Letter position is that it violates the materialistic approach to history. Before even the material conditions—those of a conscious majority—are at hand, the Open Letter advocates know them in advance.

For this reason we cannot take seriously the charge that we, the supporters of the 1951 conference position do not believe in the action of the conscious majority. Rather it is the opposite. Were the material conditions at the time the conscious majority comes about to be such as to obviate the ballot (and by the ballot we do not mean a vote, but the ballot as existing under the present economic system),

and were the majority to utilize some other method, then it would be the Open Letter advocates who would be rejecting the majority. They would say to the majority: See here, my good majority; you are not carrying out this revolution as some twenty-five or fifty or a hundred years ago we stated you had to carry it out. It is necessary to reject your methods, and use the ballot as the only weapon of emancipation.

No, it is these comrades who hold the 1951 conference position who are permitting the socialist revolution to be carried out by the conscious majority, and it is the Open Letter position which would have the majority reject itself.

## II.

If indeed the socialist revolution must wait upon the development of a conscious majority, and the World Socialist Party contains only a relatively few members of the working class, why should the method of obtaining socialism—the ballot or not the ballot—become of such importance at this stage? Are not those who uphold the 1951 conference position just as dogmatic as the Open Letter supporters in demanding today that their position be favoured as against the other? To answer this in the affirmative is to misunderstand the position of 1951 conference. We state the possibilities of the ballot as a weapon of emancipation, but we do not close the door to other possibilities, depending on the development of material conditions. Thus, those who believe it will be the ballot are acceptable in the Party under our position. The Open Letter declares the ballot to be the only weapon of emancipation. Those who are of the opinion that history may dictate other methods to the conscious majority would be excluded from the Party under this position.

As badly split as the socialist movement has been in this country, and in many cases the schisms have resulted from this constant attempt—such as executed by the Open Letter in this instance—to narrow it down further, we should not make it more and more difficult to become a socialist by drawing closer and closer the lines of defining one.

We have our principles. We recognise the necessity of majority action, that the political state must be overcome, that the change must be a revolutionary one without any transition periods. Beyond this at this particular stage we cannot go. The growth of the movement itself will be a change in the material conditions, and new circumstances will alter the case. But the Open Letter position does not permit the growth of a movement of any sort, because it immediately excludes socialists. This is the importance of this ballot issue, that it stands in the way—as similar dogmatic positions have stood in the way on other occasions—of the uniting of the socialists into one organization.

It will not solve the problem to quote from S.P.G.B. pamphlets or articles which have appeared in the *Western Socialist*. These articles contain no analysis, and do not deal specifically with the conditions in the United States. They are mere ukase-like statements or outright rejections containing "must be", and "must", and the "workers will", and the "vote is to be the weapon", etc. The question we are dealing with here cannot be settled that easily. As a matter of fact, we shall demonstrate the lack of analysis on the part of the Open Letter advocates and their insistence on sheer dogma in the following section.

(We have taken out section 3 with the exception of one paragraph. Section 3 deals mainly with the peculiarities of the American Constitution and the deficiencies of the American balloting arrangements. As this section stands alone in its subject matter and the rest of the matter deals with general propositions it seemed the logical thing to arrange the two parts in this manner. Section three will appear next month. The one paragraph from section three we publish follows immediately and precedes section 4.—Editors.)

Of course, the above arguments do not apply to Great Britain where a Parliamentary system permits a change in government over night, so to speak, and where there is no Constitution to be protected and defended. The workers are better able in England to effect a revolutionary change through Parliament than the workers in the U.S. through Congress. However, the same arguments used in this paper—that if the State, remaining in the hands of the ruling class minority physically prevents

the majority from taking over, then the majority would have to decide on other action to assert itself—these arguments prevail not only in England but in any country in the world.

## IV.

Socialists are continually pointing to history, and stating that we must learn the lessons which history has handed down. Can any deduction be drawn from such a study to indicate the precise manner in which the socialist revolution will be carried out, whether by the ballot, a congressional majority, or some other method? It is our contention that there has never been a successful socialist revolution, and therefore we have nothing to guide us. Even if there had been, the material conditions would be so changed, as to necessitate a change in our attitudes.

Successful bourgeois revolutions have, however, taken place, in the past. They were revolutions carried out by the leadership of a minority, fought by the majority, and culminating in the victory of a new minority ruling class, with the latest form of exploitation over the majority. These bourgeois revolutions taught us what the socialist revolution must not be—a minority movement in the interests of minority, and what it must be—a movement of the conscious majority in the interests of the majority.

These are the only premises history has set forth for the socialist revolution, and they are general premises. History has given us nothing of details as to whether the ballot can, may or must be the way to bring about socialism.

One thing we do know, and that is as long as capitalism exists, the State will exist, and this state with all its forces will be employed to defend the interests of the ruling class. Thus, one might say that the minority cannot forever stand in the path of the majority, but what is there to guarantee that the

socialists can have the opportunity to become the majority as long as the State exists? We have nothing on which to base our answer. In Germany and Italy, where social-democratic movements did not threaten the complete abolition of capitalism—but only its reform—the state acted swiftly and established a police dictatorship. In the United States, the most powerful capitalist nation in the world, and in which the brutality of the police in strikes has little parallel throughout the world, movements are already under way to outlaw "subversive" groups from the ballot. What use would the socialists be able to make of the ballot if they are not allowed even to appear on it? Our opponents might reply that nothing can stand in the way of a growing socialist movement, but how, from their viewpoint, is this growth to be recorded without the ballot? How will the socialist minority be able to get on the ballot? By demanding "civil rights"? The capitalists who control the State will see to it that these rights are not asserted.

If an outright dictatorship such as existed in Germany and Italy—and now exists in Russia—were to come about in the United States, the socialists, according to advocates of the Open Letter, would have to conduct a struggle for the ballot. Assume by some manner or another they force the dictatorship to place the socialists on the ballot—this is just for argument's sake because it can't happen this way—and then the socialists achieve a majority. The armed forces are still in control of the capitalist class. The socialists state: we have the majority, and demand the unconditional surrender of the capitalist class. The latter refuses to surrender. Then of what avail is the ballot? Our opponents will say that along with a developing socialist majority will come a sympathetic response from the armed forces. How do we know this? How do we know the forces may not be balanced?

The position adopted at the 1951 conference does not have to answer the foregoing in a dogmatic fashion, and herein lies its strength. This position states that the socialists will utilize the ballot to measure the socialist consciousness of the working class, but it does not bind itself (or the majority, which it cannot bind anyway, in spite of the Open Letter attempts to do so) by the ballot, so that if the ballot is denied to the majority, or if the ballot does not reflect the wishes of the majority, or if the minority blocks the majority in spite of a majority ballot, then the majority "will know what to do".

The Open Letter states that "until such a time as we are shown how a conscious majority of socialists can

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## RESTRICTIVE PRACTISES

An ex-member of our Party once said that we had an attitude to things but not a policy. He was expressing a similar idea to those who say that we make comprehensive generalisations but stumble over details. There is much truth in that.

To reason from the particular to the general is faulty. To generalise and ignore the particular is worse. Those who see the wood but not the trees are just as handicapped as those who cannot see the wood for the trees.

On our broad generalisations—on our attitude to institutions and events—we are mostly agreed. It is when we come to define the limits and the details that we start to argue. It is simple to say to a fellow worker, "Along this path, brother, lies the way, and the only way to your emancipation." It is not so simple to explain to him how to overcome the many obstacles that lie in that path.

We can say quite boldly, and in concert, as we said in the July, 1952, issue of the S.S., "We support Trade Union activity that is genuinely in the interests of the working class." When we are called upon to define whether a certain line of activity is genuinely in the interest of the working class we get at loggerheads.

During the past few years we have heatedly debated such issues as, the closed shop; craft, trade, or industrial organisation; the political levy; break-away unions; restrictive practices, and others. The 1951 London bus strike over the employment of women conductors gave impetus to the arguments over restrictive practices. It is still one of the best examples to use in these discussions.

Capitalism is a competitive system. Capitalist competes with capitalist to capture and to keep markets. Worker must compete with worker to get and to hold a job. No matter how comradesly the workers may be, capitalism forces them to push and jostle one another in the struggle to get a living. The competition does not cease when the worker gets a job, he must still compete to keep it. He also needs to guard his wage rates and working conditions, which usually means that he must get into a Trade Union and continue the pushing and jostling in an organised manner. Out of this come the so-called restrictive practices that some members of the Party condemn as not being in the interest of the workers and claim, in consequence, that the workers should not indulge in them.

We recognise that the competitive struggle amongst workers for a limited number of jobs is a result of the capitalist system. To tell them to give up struggling amongst themselves is equivalent to telling some of them to resign themselves to hunger and unemployment. Capitalism will not be destroyed that way. As soon as a worker gets a job and takes competitive steps to keep it, it would seem that he is acting in a manner detrimental to his class interests.

I claim that if workers make no effort to resist dilution and if they allow employers to move other workers into jobs just as and when it suits the employers, they will not only sacrifice the wage levels and working conditions of the particular job concerned, but they will also help to reduce the general wage level of the working class as a whole. That certainly cannot be claimed to be in the interests of the working class.

It has always been our case that variations in supply and demand cause fluctuations in prices and we do not exempt the price of labour-power. Following from this we argue that it is invariably a bad time to make wage increase demands when there is considerable unemployment. The supply of labour-power exceeds the demand and the tendency is to press wages down. Workers in some jobs resist the easy importation of other workers because they know that the employers' object is to keep wage rates low or force them lower. No harm is caused to working class interests by this resistance. On the contrary, without some resistance the employers could, by astute manoeuvring of the reserve army of labourers between one job and another, even between one country and another, could depress the general level of workers living standards to the detriment of the whole class.

It is in that light that the 1951 bus strike must be regarded. We can dismiss the superficial idea that busmen opposed

the entrance of women into the passenger transport industry purely out of an anti-feminist bias. London busmen, like all workers, but more so than most, were suffering a wage reduction, not by having their pay reduced, but by having their living costs increased without a corresponding increase in their pay. They were trying to resist this wage decrease. The London Transport Executive was short of staff and the busmen considered, having a mind to the supply and demand factor, that the time was favourable to, at least, maintain their real wage by seeking an increase in pay. If the L.T.E. had not wished to force wage rates down, it could have increased the weekly pay, thus attracting more workers to the industry and solving the staff shortage problem. But the L.T.E. chose to draw from the reserve army of female labourers at a real wage that was daily declining, with the obvious intention of keeping the level of money wages paid constant whilst the cost of living soared higher and higher.

Once the L.T.E. was allowed to draw on this reserve army, the favourable position of demand exceeding supply was lost to the London busmen. So they said, in effect, to the L.T.E., Restore the wage decrease that we have suffered by paying us an additional £1 a week and then you can employ as many women as you please, but, if we do not get that £1 a week, we will resist the employment of any more women in the industry. That, we are told by some Party members, is a restrictive practice. I consider that it was a very sensible practice and one which, had it been successful in its object (it was sabotaged by the Busmen's Union), would have been in the interests of busmen, of the women who could eventually become conductors at a higher rate of pay, and of the working class in general.

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that female bus conductors will, in time, completely replace the men conductors, leaving the men to wander off in search of other employment, and, possibly, to be rounded up and used by some other employer in the same manner that the L.T.E. is using the women, to the detriment of other workers' pay and conditions. So the process can go on.

I know that if the working class was class-conscious it would not tolerate such things. But workers can only stop these things from happening by abolishing capitalism. Until they do that they must protect themselves from the capitalist class even at the expense of shoving one another about. We shall not be assisting them by telling them not to compete with one another whilst they still accept wage labour, any more than the pacifists assist them by telling them to refuse to fight in war-time whilst they are still imbued with nationalist ideas.

I make no defence of any line of working class action that sets out purposely to harm or hinder some other section of the working class. But, any action aimed at resisting or opposing the capitalist class, even though it may result in a temporary disadvantage to some other section of the working class, that action I will invariably support. In a class war of this nature a sectional gain by one side can be considered a gain to the side as a whole. Nothing is lost if, in advancing one section, another section is kept at a standstill.

It has been argued that the workers can strike in support of their demands instead of employing these restrictive practices. The strike is a double-edged weapon, both costly and dangerous. Very sensibly, workers only resort to it when other avenues have failed. Even where strike action is contemplated it would be foolish to welcome dilutees into an industry, under the conditions of the London busmen's example, immediately before the time of the proposed strike. Dilutees are usually non-union elements and it takes time to organise them. Once they are admitted to an industry, as the women were admitted to the passenger transport industry, they are a danger to any attempted strike action until they are organised and have the same outlook as the older workers in the industry. Having but recently obtained the job they are opposed to losing any working time and will usually vote against strike action. With that outlook they are, of course, potential blacklegs and a menace to strikers.

To generalise on restrictive practices and say that they are harmful to working class interests, then to stretch the generalisation to cover every issue that

Continued foot Col. 4

## THOMSON DISPUTE

(The editorial in the June S.S., "A New Form of Censorship" evoked much controversy in the Party. At the request of the E.C. we publish some details of the matter. We reproduce part of the article below and the letter of protest from the Kingston Branch. Further criticisms of the article were submitted to the E.C. by some of its members and these are crowded out of this issue.)

—CENSORSHIP? ?—

The *Manchester Guardian* for the 9th May, printed a statement by the proprietors of the *City Press*, a London weekly newspaper, which contained the following paragraphs:—

"Alexander Publications, Ltd., proprietors of the 'City Press' newspaper, regret to announce that the 'City Press' is not available this week. The Trade Unions concerned with the printing of the paper have objected to the publication of an article giving the point of view of D. C. Thomson & Co., and giving support to that company in its dispute with the unions."

"The unions have informed the 'City Press' that publication will be permitted if the article concerned is deleted, an important matter of principle involving the whole question of freedom of the press and freedom of expression being involved. Mr. W. S. Alexander and his associates refuse to concede to the requests of the unions."

If the position is as stated above, and we have reason to believe that it is accurate, then it is another example of the mistaken attitude of those who seek, not with any bad motives, to prevent the expression of ideas or criticisms that offend them.

We are not at the moment concerned with the merits or demerits of the dispute out of which this apparent attempt to silence criticism arose, but with the harmful principle which some workers in the printing trade appear to be pressing—that they shall have the final word in what shall or shall not be printed.

There are already considerable obstacles to free expression of opinion in the most allegedly democratic countries, particularly for those holding views contrary to the ruling ideas. Such obstacles include libel laws and the like, the extent of influence exercised by those who support the present capitalist régime, the lack of finance and other means to ventilate unpopular views and similar technical difficulties. If to these difficulties are added the right of workers in the printing trade to set themselves up as some kind of censors of what shall or shall not be printed, then considerable strides will be made towards accepting the principle, beloved of dictatorships, that nothing is printed except what suits a ruling clique. In other words the struggles of centuries for freedom of opinion, and the achievements in that direction, will have been wasted.

To strike over wages and conditions of labour is part of the worker's fight for livable existence under capitalism, but to strike over the constitution of the product of labour is something entirely different. A little reflection should make this clear. Imagine the situation if action in harmony with the latter became a part of trade union practice. Vegetarian trade unionists would strike against handling meat; atheistic trade unionists would strike against handling Bibles; Christian trade unionists would strike against handling certain scientific matter; cycling trade unionists would strike against handling motor-cars; and so on. The net result of this would be bewildering confusion.

It may appear that we are taking too serious a view of a few isolated instances, but evil trends commence in a small way and, if left unchallenged, take root and unconsciously become part of established practice. As our readers will be aware, we have already been victims of this budding censorship and we can foresee the lengths to which it might be carried if left alone. Those who seek to suppress opinion that offends them are moved by intentions that, to themselves, appear to be in the best interests of humanity. As people hold conflicting views upon what is in the best interest of humanity, the acceptance of the censorship principle means, in effect, that those who have the power can determine what views shall or shall not be ventilated and, in the last analysis, will remain in power; thus, either social progress ceases or there is a weltering ferment of discontent which will eventually flare up into disorders that bring only confusion in their wake.

Correspondence and articles should be sent to FORUM, S.P.G.B., 52 Clapham High Street, S.W.4. Subscriptions 7/6 per annum. Cheques and P.O.'s should be made payable to E. Lake, S.P.G.B.

## EDITORIAL

In the first issue of FORUM editorial comment is reduced to brevity by the amount of material submitted for publication. Maybe, that is as it should be. The articles, except for the Thomson dispute which the E.C. requested to be printed, have been solicited by the committee responsible for publication. The article by Frank Evans is introductory and it followed by five others amplifying his case. The material on the ballot from the W.S.P. illustrates the extent to which this controversy has developed. The article Restrictive Practices was planned before we received instructions to publish details of the Thomson dispute. Both these questions illustrate the contrast between agreement on general principles and the disagreement which can arise when those general principles are applied to particular events. The article by J. Trotman deals with a controversy which seemed to have been disposed of when we asked him to write it but which we were sure was only sleeping. Some opinions expressed at Delegate Meeting indicate we were right in assuming that no recent decision in the Party on this question can really satisfy anyone as to what the Party's view really is.

The one quality which stands out in these contributions is the implied loyalty to the principles and fundamentals of Socialism. May it—let it, remain that way, and FORUM could become the means of bringing Socialists in the parent and companion parties into a direct relationship with each other which will be to the benefit of all of us.

## HEARD AT THE DELEGATE MEETING

"Forty years ago when I first joined the Party I earned ninepence an hour as an electrician. To-day, if I worked at my trade, I would earn three shillings and ninepence an hour. Forty years ago I paid twopence a week dues to the Party, today I pay threepence."

## ARTICLES RECEIVED

We have received articles and other matter for publication from several members. They will all be written to.

## NOW RESIDENT ABROAD

Joyce Millen (Paddington) is in W. Africa.

Kitty Curzon (Paddington) is in Australia.

Jack Taylor and wife (Hampstead) are now in New Zealand where they seemed to have settled down along with other comrades recently arrived from England. We have heard from Jack who has already entered the political fray over there. When he receives FORUM there is not any doubt that we shall hear from him again . . . for publication.

Good wishes to all of them. The Party would like to hear from them and all other comrades living abroad.

## Restrictive Practices Continued from Col. 2

arises, gives rise to the claim that we have an attitude to things but not a policy. It makes us look a bit sheepish when we are called upon to define our position in relation to some particular issue and we can only reiterate our generalisation, frequently knowing, even though vaguely, that it does not suit the case in court.

There is one argument advanced against my point of view that I think is nonsensical. It is claimed that this competitive pushing, jostling and shoving amongst the workers prevents them from clearly seeing their common class interests. Workers do not compete with one another with anything like the same ferocity that capitalists do. But does the spiteful unscrupulous competition within the capitalist class prevent the capitalists from recognising their class interests? Class consciousness can grow amongst the workers out of a loathing for the system that makes them push one another around.

W. WATERS.



## Is the Time Opportune for Contesting Elections

### Should we Doff

#### "The Big Hat"

The first issue of FORUM has come at an appropriate moment for a discussion on the question of contesting elections; not because of the possibility of a poll on the subject in the near future, but because the grave increase in the Party's debt will have settled the question of the next election for most members whatever their general attitude to the question, making possible a more objective approach to the whole problem than is possible when in the heat of an immediate issue—except possibly for a few who seem to feel that they are carrying a banner for a pro- or anti-parliamentary faction.

The chief concern of the writer, therefore, will be to attempt to deal with some of the arguments which spring from a wrong approach and to establish what he considers to be a correct perspective for the purpose of arriving at correct decisions in the future. It is also an endeavour to find a path between those two incorrect extremes of opinion which say on the one hand that only one contest will be necessary, and on the other that every election must be contested without qualification.

We all of us want to see Socialists on the floor of the House of Commons. When we contest elections we feel that at last we are on the road and we get a great kick out of doing all the necessary work involved. Consequently we all have a strong desire to indulge in the kind of activity which, if it is not consciously guarded against, may easily distort the perspective which we are trying to establish. It is such a desire, intensified to the point of passion, which can alone explain such peculiar and somewhat religious-like arguments such as that of the E.C. member who asserted at the 1950 Delegate Meeting that contesting elections had something to do with a "Socialist Spirit", whatever that may be. But to more serious considerations.

Firstly, what is the purpose of a General Election? It is to obtain representation in the House of Commons. No one will deny that this is impossible for us at the moment and nobody argues from this point of view, but it is as well to keep this in mind as a first step towards seeing in perspective. Some, of course, use this as an argument for not contesting elections and rule out all other considerations as irrelevant. Such an argument, however, is sheer nonsense as, if it can be shown that the Party gains some benefit from contesting an election which is not directly related to this main purpose, this must be taken into consideration when arriving at a decision; and it is in fact around these secondary considerations that most of the arguments turn.

The most important of the secondary considerations is the by-product of propaganda value which is obtained by having a candidate in the field. A number of extra indoor meetings in the constituency contested is possible; apart from this, it is difficult to see what can be done with a candidate which cannot be done without one. As to the propaganda value of the candidate himself, there is no doubt that he brings the name of the Party before the public through mention in the press, radio, etc., but this in itself is useless as the object of our propaganda is to publicise our ideas and not our name. Any indirect effect this may have in creating a desire to explore our ideas must be very small if it exists at all. If literature sales are any indication—and they are the only indication we have—the effect was small indeed, sales for the first half of 1950 during which the election was held being only £49 up on those for the same period of the previous year, an increase only to be expected during the height of an election, candidate or not. It is interesting to note in this connection that whereas the Parliamentary Committee reported that no inquiries about the Party could be

traced to our election campaign, a small and inexpensive advertisement in an Esperanto journal produced numerous inquiries from all parts of the world, including England.

The foregoing observations should help us to put the propaganda value of a candidate in its true perspective. What remains now is to decide whether this is the most effective way in which to spend our resources, for even when we have something apart from debts left over after normal running expenses have been deducted, for a party such as ours these resources will always be meagre and not to use them in the most effective way possible is a hindrance to the Party and a disservice to the socialist movement.

It must be remembered that this dubious propaganda advantage of having candidates in the field at election times costs the Party anything from £800 upwards. The last campaign, it will be remembered, cost the Party £1,235 and it was proved conclusively in S.W. London's circular on the subject that a special parliamentary fund made no difference to our total income. It must be asked, then, whether such sums—when we have them—could not be spent more usefully in other channels, such as publishing more literature, or, for that matter giving it away, provincial propaganda work, full-time editors or other staff doing more directly useful work than providing a figure-head for about a month in every five years. Finally it must be recognised that socialist propaganda is essentially a long-term policy and electoral activity essentially a short-term method. It is unfortunate, but the most sensational methods which are useful to other organisations are not necessarily the best for one which bases its case on understanding.

One other kind of argument which has to be considered is that election campaigns provide a stimulus for the members and increase their activity. Unfortunately, however, all the evidence goes to show that the increased activity is confined to the electioneering itself and the stimulus lasts no longer than the actual campaign. This perversion of our function in order to contest elections for the sake of contesting them to provide an artificial stimulus for the membership is a kind of political masturbation which, whilst it may be fun, is extremely wasteful of our resources, and is indicative of an adolescent organisation making a rather pathetic attempt to simulate adult activity.

Of a similar nature is the argument that a candidate is of value because it makes a show of doing something. Quite apart from the possibility of attracting support merely because we are making a show, support which is therefore non-socialist and dangerous (remember the 200 non-socialists at the first contest), this argument springs from the "If you can't fight wear a big hat" principle. Compared with the giant stotsons of the major political parties our "big hat" is reduced to dimensions smaller than the button on a pimple cap. It frightens no one and impresses no one. To those who were stirred by the article in the S.S. which asserted in our first campaign that "a shadow has fallen across the capitalist world" and bade the ruling class "tremble", it is suggested that were a capitalist observed reading it he would not so much be trembling as shaking—with laughter. No, comrades, we cannot fool the working class with such devices and we must stop fooling ourselves.

A last word to the few who have made no decision on the present situation. Some shirk their responsibility by leaving the financial question to the E.C. Comrades, we are approximately £900 in debt, our expenditure is exceeding our income, the special appeal for funds has met with small response so far and there is a pamphlet waiting to be published through lack of money. The E.C. is pushing ahead with preparations for the next elections, not because it is irresponsible but because it has been instructed by the Party. The responsibility is yours.

J. TROIMAN.

## Reply Kingston Branch

15th July, 1952.

It is the opinion of the Kingston Branch that this leading article expresses a point of view unworthy of our Party. The article expresses a general opposition to censorship and applies that opposition to the action of the employees of Alexander Publications Ltd. who refused to print an article giving the point of view of, and support to, D. C. Thomson in his dispute with his employees.

We endorse the demand for freedom of the press and for freedom of speech, but we are not prepared to claim that the printers employed by Alexander Publications Ltd. acted in a manner detrimental to their class interests. The dispute in Thomsons is being fought over the workers' right to organise in Trade Unions. The defeat of Thomson's workers may encourage other employers to follow his lead. All workers are affected by this issue, and the printing trade workers are in the line of fire.

The action of Alexander Publications' workers was not so much a matter of assisting their fellow workers in the fight against Thomson, as a refusal to assist Thomson in his fight against them. We admire them for it. Kingston Branch cannot identify itself with the condemnation of their action expressed in the June S.S.

There was no attempt at censorship; just a plain refusal to assist a class enemy in his dispute with fellow workers. Thomson has the whole field of capitalist printing machinery at his disposal. Let him and his supporters use it, but do not expect the workers to help him. THERE IS A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GAGGING A MAN AND REFUSING TO BE HIS MOUTHPIECE.

If Alexander Publications' workers had downed tools and come out in a straightforward strike in support of Thomson's workers—if they had refused to print anything at all—that, we presume, would have been applauded by us as an example of class solidarity. Because they threatened to stop work for a short time on one particular article, they are to be condemned for the opposite. It was a STRIKE, not a censorship. In refusing to print that article those men struck just as dockers do when they refuse to handle one particular type of objectionable goods.

This action cannot be tied up with the examples quoted in the June S.S., such as cycling Trade Unionists striking against handling motor cars or atheistic Trade Unionists striking against handling Bibles. The suggestion that these situations are similar makes nonsense and holds us to ridicule.

In this issue workers' economic interests are at stake, and they have taken the simple and straightforward action of refusing to be the medium for expressing a capitalist point of view over a dispute in progress with fellow workers in the same trade. We hope that all class-conscious workers would do likewise. We should express pleasure that this action came from men who possibly are but vaguely class-conscious.

We agree that the workers are not ignoramuses and that they can make up their own minds on all questions—IF they get all points of view. The capitalist is very loath to allow expression of working class points of view, so the workers usually get a lop-sided view of most questions. Are we to add to the bias by urging workers to print their class enemies' propaganda whilst all sorts of obstacles are in the way of printing their own?

Let the capitalist put over his point of view. Let him print it, film it, broadcast it, televise it; let him put it over any way he can. But do not let the Socialist Party tell the workers to help him do so, under the guise that they will be defending the freedom of the press that their forefathers so bitterly fought for. Their forefathers got no help from their class enemies, nor did they expect it—that is why the struggle was so bitter. The capitalist class must not be encouraged to expect help from the workers in an issue such as this. They will never be shamed into relinquishing their system, or even part of their profits, by the Socialist Party adopting an "After you, Sir," attitude.

We, in Kingston Branch, oppose censorship. But we say, "Strength to the Alexander Publications' workers for their STRIKE."

(There are also letters from E. Lake, C. Groves and J. Trotman on the above matter and which are all critical of the editorial in question. Owing to pressure on space these are held over until next month.—Editors.)

Cantor's Reply Continued from Page 2

make itself known and wrest control of the State from the capitalist class in any other way than through the ballot, we refuse to waste our energies upon idle conjecture." But the question we would like to ask is, How can the Open Letter comrades show that the ballot *will be* the method of wresting control of the State from the capitalist class? Would they issue a certificate of guarantee to every one who joins the World Socialist Party that it will be the ballot, and nothing but the ballot? Is it not just as much idle conjecture on the part of the Open Letter, as it is on ours? Of course, we may be proved wrong, and we openly admit we may be proved wrong, because no one can predict the future in a society as complicated as ours. But the Open Letter refuses to admit it may be wrong. It *knows*, without equivocation, beyond a peradventure of doubt that events are going to take place as they predict them. This is dogma at its highest point.

The Open Letter quotes that part of the I.W.S.P. pamphlet on the ballot which states, "However, as a minority party, the World Socialist Party does not, nor should not, lay down the exact steps by which the majority once it becomes socialist, will introduce socialism." Yet it fails to quote the preceding statement that "the World Socialist Party holds that the ballot presents the most practical and possible way for the workers to obtain political power." No doubt this was an oversight. In any case we wish to point out that neither the 1951 conference position, nor that of the I.W.S.P. pamphlet rejects the ballot, as the Open Letter would seem to imply. What else is there to advocate today but the ballot? With the socialists as few as they are in the United States today, advocacy of any method to achieve socialism is practically meaningless, as the socialists are not in a position to do anything about this advocacy. Perhaps by the time they are a majority, they will have to advocate some other method.

One might say in opposition that the World Socialist Party, as a political party with the aim of capturing the State, must inform the workers how it is going to accomplish its political objective. But can the World Socialist Party guarantee that it will be the party which will carry out the socialist revolution without committing itself to a leadership ideology? How can the World Socialist Party assure the workers that the conditions at the time a majority is obtained will be identical with those prevailing today? Of course, it cannot guarantee any of the two.

The 1951 conference position does not advocate violence. There is no specific virtue in the use of violence, nothing to commend it as a way to socialism. But history has taught that the violence always arises from the other side, from the side in power, and that the workers are forced to defend themselves physically.

Our position declares in advance that the majority will not be thwarted. If a majority sentiment exists for socialism, and the existing legalistic balloting system stands in the way, then the majority will be compelled to find another way to carry out its objective.

As socialists we must first of all advocate a revolutionary change in society. The method must be that of a conscious majority. The Open Letter comrades shy away from this point, because they make the ballot or not the ballot the principle question, and not the revolutionary action of the conscious majority. Such a position as this can easily lead to the World Socialist Party taking an anti-revolutionary attitude, that is, opposing a conscious majority engaged in revolutionary activity—we will not say what type specifically—because it is not employing the existing ballot machinery.

A socialist party must be supple. Never swaying from its main objective, it must nevertheless be prepared to alter its attitudes with each new change of material conditions. This is our approach, and on this ground we take our stand.